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AUTHOR Calvert, William; Hutchinson, Roger L.
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not a relationship exists between levels of combat experienced by Vietnam veterans and later perceptions of violence, violent attitudes, or violent behavior. Comparison groups included: (1) heavy combat Vietnam veterans; (2) light combat Vietnam veterans; (3) no combat Vietnam veterans; and (4) civilians (non-veterans). Participants were members of central Indiana Vietnam veterans organizations. Subjects in the civilian group were friends of participants. Level of combat was determined by Figley's Level of Combat Questionnaire. Past behavioral problems and the similarity of the groups were measured by the Brief Demographic Questionnaire (BDQ). The Combat Experience Questionnaire was used to determine actual combat experiences. To gauge attitudes toward violence, the Attitudes and Issues Scale was used. The CT Scales, a modification of Straus's original Conflict Tactics Scales, were used to measure actual behavioral violence. Based upon the results of this study, levels of combat appear to be unrelated to post-war violent attitudes. Also, neither heavy nor light combat Vietnam veterans appear to engage in violent behavior any more than their Vietnam era veteran or civilian peers. (SM)

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Vietnam Veteran Levels of Combat:

Perceived and Actual Violence

William E. Calvert

The Madison Clinic

Anderson, Indiana

Roger L. Hutchinson

Ball State University

Running Head: VIETNAM VETERAN VIOLENCE

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Mailing Address: Roger L. Hutchinson
TC 619
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether or not a relationship exists between levels of combat experienced by Vietnam veterans and later perceptions of violence, violent attitudes, or violent behavior. Comparison groups included 1) heavy combat Vietnam veterans, 2) light combat Vietnam veterans, 3) Vietnam era veterans, and 4) civilians (non-veterans). Based upon the results of this study, levels of combat appear to be unrelated to post-war violent attitudes. Also, neither heavy nor light combat Vietnam veterans appear to engage in violent behavior any more than their Vietnam era veteran or civilian peers.

Vietnam Veteran Levels of Combat:

Perceived and Actual Violence

The Vietnam conflict (war) became an unpopular and controversial endeavor. Pilisuk (1975) reports the tragic results of the conflict: approximately 58,000 American soldiers died in Vietnam; 425,000 Vietnamese civilians killed; 182,000 Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN or South Vietnamese) soldiers killed; 900,000 enemy killed. The same author notes that "more than 500,000 (U. S. service personnel) left the service with less than an honorable discharge, more than 300,000 were wounded, more than 23,000 totally disabled, and more than 5,400 lost one or more limbs. Thirty percent of the male inmates of federal prisons are veterans and 100,000 Vietnam era veterans have died since returning home" (p. 9).

The Vietnam veterans who served and fought in Vietnam have been said to have many problems (Goodwin, 1980). An examination of the literature reveals a trend toward relating Vietnam combat experience to later difficulties, including Vietnam veteran post-war violence (Eisenhart, 1975). Bergmann (1982a) states that "more Vietnam veterans died from self-inflicted wounds since the war than those killed while in combat in Vietnam" (p. 115). Back (1982) noted that "there are 3,669 veterans incarcerated in State and Federal penal institutions in Indiana alone, representing 62 percent of the total prison population. Of these 3,669 veterans, 71 percent are Vietnam veterans" (p. 2).

Eisenhart (1977) refers to the primary military function as being aggression and further states that "the violence potential of Vietnam veterans is perhaps the most crucial issue for society" (p. 21). In the military field, the more violent, aggressive, and murderous toward the enemy that one is, the more rewards the soldier receives. The same violent actions under non-war conditions

could result in imprisonment or even capital punishment. Yager (1975), in speaking of the role the military plays in violent actions, observed that "learning theory suggests that violent behavior will increase when violent models are present to be imitated, especially when the models are important figures" (p. 260). In Vietnam there were obviously many viable role models.

Bergmann (1982b) and Brown (1984) report on the amount of violence they have found among the spouses and families of Vietnam veterans and conclude that there is little question that Vietnam veterans have participated in post-war violence. However, in direct contrast, Archer and Gartner in a 1976 article entitled "The Myth of the Violent Veteran" question the validity of the generalized claim that Vietnam veterans are violent. They state that, historically, warring societies have always feared the returning warrior and note that "on some intuitive level, it seems, people accept the idea that the skills and habits of war may spill over into civilian life" (p. 94). They further state that two ancient but unsubstantiated ideas stand out in all these cases: first, that the soldier becomes habituated to violence, and second, that he becomes proficient at it. Archer and Gartner summarize their findings by observing that there is a tendency for society at large to become more violent after a war, but that this increase cannot necessarily be attributed to the violence of ex-soldiers.

Several theoretical approaches offer concepts as to what causes violence and/or aggression. Instinctual or innate theorists would suggest that the tendency toward aggression resides in one since birth. Biological theorists would be inclined to base their conclusions on ethological studies of animal behavior and a belief that one's habitat is the core contributing factor regarding aggression or violence. In contrast, Bandura (1973), a social learning theorist, suggests that people learn their own ways of responding to and acting upon the environment. According to

Bandura, not only can we learn new aggressive acts and behaviors, but we also learn the relevant and appropriate attitudes and values which accompany these acts and behaviors. Consequently, it would seem to follow that observing or acting violently in one situation does not necessarily result in violent acts in apparently different situations or environments.

The question remains unanswered as to whether or not the violence manifested by Vietnam veterans exceeds that of their non-veteran counterparts. Much speculation is offered, but little research can be found to address this specific issue. Many Americans were clearly apprehensive about and even fearful of the returning Vietnam veteran both during and after the war. After all, many of these veterans were highly trained in explosives, ambush, search and destroy missions, and other violent and deadly combat skills.

Are Vietnam veterans more violent in civilian life than their non-veteran peers? Do they possess more violent attitudes? How do they see themselves and each other in terms of being violent? The purpose of this study was to assess whether or not Vietnam veterans, as a group, are more violent than other American citizens. If so, does the level-of-combat they have experienced influence a propensity toward violence?

Method

Participants

Four participant groups were utilized in this study: 1) Vietnam Veterans of heavy combat, 2) Vietnam Veterans of light combat, 3) Vietnam Era Veterans, no combat, and 4) Non-veterans, no combat. Thirty participants filled the cells in each of the above four groups for a total of 120 participants. All of the veterans in groups one, two, and three were asked to participate in this research via their membership in independent Central Indiana Vietnam veteran organizations:

Vietnam Veterans of Delaware County, Inc.; Howard County Vietnam Veterans, Inc.; and the Vietnam Veterans of Mid-North Indiana, Inc.

All Vietnam veterans agreeing to participate in the study were asked to bring a male friend approximately the same age as themselves to provide subjects for the non-veteran, no combat group. No significant pre-service (or before age 20 if a civilian non-veteran) differences were found between the four groups regarding age, race, marital status, income level, level of education, drug and alcohol use, psychological counseling received, behavioral problems in school, or legal conviction history prior to entering military service.

Definition of Terms

Heavy Combat, defined as a cut-off score of 35 or above on Figley's Level of Combat Questionnaire.

Light Combat, defined as a cut-off score of under 35 on Figley's Level of Combat Questionnaire.

Vietnam Era Veteran, (VEV) is used to designate those military veterans who served on active duty for a period of at least 181 days, but who did not serve in either Vietnam or in the Southeast Asian Theater. In this study, a Vietnam era veteran will not have served in combat and will have served in the military between August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975. Although a Vietnam veteran is also usually considered to be a VEV, he was not so considered for the purposes of this study.

Vietnam Veteran: a military veteran who served in the Republic of Vietnam between the dates of August 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975. While this term is usually defined by the Veterans' Administration and other agencies as anyone who served in the Vietnam Theater, the "in-country" definition was used for the purposes of clarity in this study.

Non-veteran, essentially a civilian who was never in the military in any form (including the

Reserves or National Guard).

Instruments

Brief Demographic Questionnaire (BDQ). Part 1 of the BDQ was designed by the researchers to help ensure the basic present similarity of the four participant groups utilized in the study regarding basic demographic variables (i.e., marital status, sex, age, race, income level, level of education). Part 2 of the BDQ is a simple staightforward measure also designed by the researchers to ascertain any possible pre-military problem behavior differences between the four participant groups. It includes questions concerning past behavioral problems in school, drug and alcohol use, psychological services received, and legal conviction history before entering military service.

Combat Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). The CEQ was developed by Charles Figley (1977), who first used the CEQ in his American Legion Study. The CEQ was chosen because it concentrates on the combat experience itself and covers a broad range of combat experiences in addition to having face validity for Vietnam Veterans. In a major research project, Penk, Robinowitz, Roberts, Patterson, Dolan, and Atkins (1981) utilized the CEQ as the instrument of choice and strongly recommended its use to other researchers.

Scenario C and the General Opinions Questionnaire. Scenario C is a two page description of a contrived newspaper article about the behavior of a 35-year-old Vietnam veteran involving the brandishing of a weapon and other behaviors. This scenario was used in this study in exactly the same manner as it was used in Wilson's (1978) Forgotten Warrior Project, with one exception. In the description of the Vietnam veteran, his age was changed in order to more accurately reflect the current age of a typical Vietnam veteran. Form C, the General Opinions

Questionnaire (GOQ) was changed somewhat from Wilson's original protocol to better fit the participants in this study.

Attitudes and Issues Scale. Form D, the Attitudes and Issues Scale is essentially the "A Violence Scale" as designed by Bardis (1973). The name of Bardis' scale was changed to the "Attitudes and Issues Scale" in order to somewhat camouflage the issue regarding what was being measured. Bardis reports reliability scores for his scale ranging from .85 to .94.

CT Scales. A modification of Straus' (1979) original Conflict Tactics Scales was used to measure actual behavioral violence.

Procedure

Research instruments were administered to all participants who attended one of the designated meetings. They were told that the purpose of the research was to find out more about Vietnam veterans and their acquaintances. Participants were assured of anonymity due to certain sensitive items on the Combat Experience Questionnaire. Completed materials in excess of the cell size of 30 in any group were selected for non-inclusion on a random basis.

The computer program, SSPS-X, was used to analyze the data. Because the data were of a categorical (nominal) nature, a Chi-Square statistic was chosen to interpret the BDQ, Part 2. For descriptive purposes, the same methodology was used to examine the BDQ, Part 1, and the CEQ. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to analyze responses by group to the Wilson violence item, to analyze the Bardis composite scores, and to analyze items on the CT Scales. The .05 level of significance was utilized.

Results

Four basic questions were raised in this study: 1) Are there demographic differences or

predisposition differences toward later problems between the four level-of-combat groups as measured by the BDQ? 2) Do the groups differ in terms of perceiving the character in Wilson's Scenario as being violent? 3) Based on Bardis' "A Violence Scale," do any of the groups possess more violent attitudes than the others? 4) Utilizing Straus' Ct Scales, the question was raised as to whether or not any of the four groups were significantly more behaviorally violent than the others.

Regarding question 1, there were no statistically significant differences found between the four level-of-combat groups regarding being predisposed to later problems as measured by the BDQ. It can therefore be assumed that later problem behaviors and attitudes are more likely a result of the Vietnam War experience itself, rather than a result of problems that participants might have possessed before entering the military. This perception refutes the predisposition theory which states that problems which veterans experienced after the war were due to problems they had prior to entering military service.

Regarding question two, it was predicted that there would be a significant difference between the four groups in terms of perceiving the Vietnam veteran in Wilson's Scenario as being violent. It was thought that the Heavy Combat Veteran might see the veteran in the scenario as being less violent due to the desesensitizing trauma of war. See Table 1. The results do not indicate a statistically significant difference between the four groups in terms of perceiving Vietnam veterans as violent. Heavy Combat Veterans appeared to perceive violence accurately and without distortion.

Insert Table 1 about here

In reference to question three, it was predicted that there would be a significant difference

between the groups in terms of violent attitude scores, with the Heavy Combat Group having the highest scores. As shown in Table 2, the results do not indicate a statistically significant difference between the four level-of-combat groups in terms of possessing violent attitudes.

Insert Table 2 about here

Regarding behavioral violence (question 4), as measured by the CT Scale, this data was tested using an analysis of variance. The CT Scale measures violence which has taken place in the last 24 months. The results of the CT Scale data are presented in Table 3.

Insert Table 3 about here

The following ANOVA analyses indicated that only one item (kicked, bit, or hit with a fist) was statistically significant. Group means and standard deviations regarding this item are presented in Table 4.

Insert Table 4 about here

"Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist" was the only item on the CT Scales which achieved statistical significance by at least one group, in this case the Heavy Combat Vietnam Veteran Group. Heavy Combat Veterans may have a tendency to engage in more personal violence (hitting or kicking) as contrasted with impersonal violence (utilizing an object such as a gun or a knife). However, since

there were no statistically significant group differences among responses to the majority of the violent acts (6 of 10 was hypothesized) on the behavioral violence scale, it cannot be asserted that the four groups differed significantly regarding behavioral violence in the past 24 months.

Discussion

Perhaps the myth of the violent Vietnam veteran may be just that, a myth. Or, the possibility exists that limiting the assessment of behavioral violence to the preceding 24 months is too restrictive in reflecting the effect of combat upon ensuing civilian violence. It is also possible that violence occurs in ways other than that measured by instruments used in this study (e.g., divorce, self-destructive acts, substance abuse, and/or suicide attempts).

According to Calvert's (1987) observations, as a result of his work with Heavy Combat Veterans who have been hospitalized for Post-traumatic Stress Disorder, as many as eighty percent (80%) of these veterans have been/are substance abusers or are recovering substance abusers and have been involved in combat behavior which resulted in the death of noncombatant civilians. Memories of such events exert a strong and negative effect upon the war veteran. Much of the current violent behavior manifested by these combat veterans involves suicidal and other self-destructive acts, as if they are punishing themselves for what happened in battle. There is a possibility that unrecognized differences and/or relationships between violent acts toward others and self-destructive behaviors exist.

The Heavy Combat Vietnam Veteran Group in this study had the highest mean scores regarding the ability to accurately perceive violence. Their direct experience in terms of violence may result in their ability to perceive violence in a more accurate manner than others surveyed. Heavy Combat Veterans received the highest statistically significant mean score on only one of the

CT Scale items (6 of 10 items was hypothesized).

Suggestions for Future Research

1) It is difficult to obtain a random sample of Vietnam Veterans. It is suggested that members of a particular high school class who could now be identified as Heavy Combat Veterans, Light Combat Veterans, Vietnam Era Veterans, or Non-veterans be utilized in future research. For instance, the graduating class of 1966 or a 9th grade class, as it was composed in 1963 or 1964, could be surveyed as a way to determine what happened to these young men following the Vietnam Conflict. 2) Figley's Combat Experience Questionnaire seems especially well-suited to differentiating between heavy and light combat levels; its continued use is recommended. 3) Screening for pre-service disposition in order to accurately assess the effects of war upon participants seems essential. 4) The continued research use of Straus' modified Conflict Tactic Scales, as used in this study, is recommended.

Conclusions

This study was designed to test the effects of previous and differing levels-of-combat. It is often assumed that a direct relationship between level-of-combat experienced and later violence exists. Perceptions of violence, violent attitudes, and violent behavior were examined. While the results of this study are not intended to be definitive, they do indicate several pertinent trends. Further research in this area is encouraged in order to better understand the effects of war on those who fought for their country. Based on the results of this study, the following conclusions may be made regarding this population:

a) There were no significant differences between Heavy Combat Vietnam Veterans, Light Combat Vietnam Veterans, Vietnam Era Veterans, and civilians (Non-veterans) in terms of having

been predisposed to violent perceptions, having violent attitudes, or engaging in violent behavior. The often stated belief that Vietnam veterans have had problems because they had them before entering military service was not supported by this study.

b) Previous heavy combat is often believed to raise the threshold in perceiving violence. Not only was this theory not supported, but an opposite trend was indicated. Vietnam veterans with heavy combat experience appear to perceive violence very accurately.

c) No relationship was found between previous combat levels and later violent attitudes. Heavy and Light Vietnam Combat Veterans were not found to have more violent attitudes than either their civilian (non-veteran) friends or Vietnam Era veterans.

d) Heavy and/or Light Combat Vietnam Veterans were not found to be more behaviorally violent than either their civilian or Vietnam Era veteran peers.

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Table 1
Wilson's Vietnam Veteran Scenario, Perceived Violence (ANOVA, N = 120)

	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	Probability
Between Groups	3	14.29	4.76	1.69	.17
Within Groups	116	327.03	2.82		
Total	119	341.33			

Table 2
Bardis' A Violence Scale, Violent Attitudes (ANOVA, N = 120)

	D.F.	Sum of Squares	Mean Squares	F Ratio	Probability
Between Groups	3	649.80	216.60	1.04	.38
Within Groups	116	24148.20	208.17		
Total	119	24798.00			

Table 3
ANOVA Analysis of Behavioral Violence Self Report

Item	F Ratio (df)	Probability
Threatened to hit/ throw something at someone	1.7269 (3,116)	.1653
Threw/smashed/hit/ kicked something	1.1128 (3,116)	.3469
Threw something at someone	2.4060 (3,116)	.0709
Pushed/grabbed/ shoved someone	1.4013 (3,116)	.2460
Slapped someone	1.0522 (3,116)	.3724
Kicked/bit/hit with fist	4.1698 (3,116)	.0076*
Hit/tried to hit with something	1.1457 (3,116)	.3337
Beat up someone	.8268 (3,116)	.4817
Threatened with knife or gun	1.7916 (3,116)	.1526
Used knife or gun	2.4421 (3,116)	.0677

*.05 level of significance

Table 4
CT Scale Item, "Kicked, bit, or hit with a fist," (ANOVA)

	Mean	Standard Deviation
Heavy Combat Vietnam Veterans	1.0333	1.7711
Light Combat Vietnam Veterans	.3667	.9279
Era Veterans	.3000	.7497
Non-Veterans	.1000	.4026